

NOVELLO'S ORIGINAL OCTAVO EDITION.

THE WATER-LILY

A ROMANTIC LEGEND

FOR SOLI, CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

THE WORDS WRITTEN BY

JOSEPH BENNETT

THE MUSIC COMPOSED BY

FREDERIC H. COWEN.

FIRST PRODUCED AT THE NORWICH TRIENNIAL MUSICAL
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NOTE.

THE libretto of this work is based upon Wordsworth's "Egyptian Maid, or the Romance of the Water-Lily."

All the incidents here musically treated are described in that poem, or suggested by it; the authority for the Prologue being the following stanza :—

"For late, as near a murmuring stream
He rested, 'mid an arbour green and shady,
Nina, the good Enchantress, shed
A light around his mossy bed,
And, at her call, a waking dream
Prefigured to his sense th' Egyptian Lady."

It is scarcely needful to add that in no part of his work has the writer of the libretto considered himself bound to follow the exact course of the poem.

THE WATER-LILY.

CHARACTERS REPRESENTED :

SIR GALAHAD	...	...	...	<i>Tenor.</i>
MERLIN	...	...	...	<i>Bass.</i>
KING ARTHUR	...	...	...	<i>Baritone.</i>
INA	...	...	...	<i>Soprano.</i>
NORNA	...	...	...	<i>Contralto.</i>

Spirits of the Air, Spirits of Storm, People of Caerleon, &c.

PROLOGUE.

A FOREST NEAR CAERLEON.

[SIR GALAHAD alone in the Forest. A rustic chorus heard in the distance.

RUSTIC CHORUS.

Man for maid and maid for man,
'Tis of heaven's arranging
Ever since the world began;
Shall there now be changing?
Joy for man and joy for maid,
They must come together,
Though the moment be delayed
By wild and wintry weather.
Sing heigh, sing ho, and wait for Spring;
A flower in her hand she'll bring.

Maiden hath not seen her mate,
He knows not she liveth;
But the kindly hand of Fate
Each to other giveth.
Seas and mountains part them now,
They will come together;
Snow may fall and tempests blow,
A fig for wintry weather.
Sing heigh, sing ho, &c.

SIR GALAHAD.

Spring hath a flower for each! What flower for me?
The blushing rose, that only half unveils
Her beauties to the sun? or lily fair—
Ah! now comes back my dream of yester-night!
Sir Lancelot gave to Guinevere a rose
(Which blushed not redder than her marble
cheek!)
I sought the water-lily's stainless bloom

As offering to my Queen, but out of reach
The flower lay. Then, as I longing looked,
Its calyx opened, and a woman's face,
With eyes of tender radiance, on me smiled!
I stood entranced; 'twas gone, and I awoke!
O sweet the Spring which brings that flower to
me!

Spirit of the lily fair,
Art thou in the earth or air?
Where the glancing ripples play,
Or on sedgy bank, dost stay?
Do the petals of thy flower
Still that dainty form embower?
Or must I seek thee in the deep,
Where the waters peaceful sleep,
And strange creatures without number
'Neath an emerald curtain slumber?

Spirit with the haunting eyes,
Dark, unfathomed, tender, wise,
Though I know not where thou art,
Well I know thou hast my heart,
And I seek mine own in thee—
O divinest mystery!
Come from glade, or bower, or stream,
Lovely lady of my dream!
Nor so long be coyly hiding,
In my arms is thy abiding!

SPIRITS OF THE AIR.

From rugged shores, where Norna dwells,
And in secret weaves her spells,
We come with the jagged lightning's speed;
To our words, Sir Knight, give heed.

SIR GALAHAD.

I heed ye, viewless Spirits of the Air;
What message from the Sorceress benign?

SPIRITS OF THE AIR.

Sleep and dream !
Spirits of this woodland place,
See that none of mortal race
Come anigh while on his eyes
Charmèd slumber gently lies.

Sleep and dream !

Spirits of the summer breeze,
Zephyrs sporting 'mongst the trees,
Hush your voices and be still ;
Water-elves, make mute the rill.

Sleep and dream !

Spirits of the upper air,
Let this duty be your care—
Veil the sun's face heedfully,
So his couch shall shaded be.

Sleep, and with the dreaming eye,
Look upon thy lady nigh.

[*The light fades. Deep silence in the forest.*
SIR GALAHAD falls into an enchanted sleep.

THE DREAM.

[*In a dream, SIR GALAHAD sees a ship in full sail, with the figure of a goddess, emerging from a lily, at her prow. On the deck sits INA, surrounded by her maidens, to whom she is speaking.*

INA.

Methought I saw upon the flowery bank,
As carelessly I floated with the stream,
A knight of noble mien, whose outstretched arm
Made as to snatch me from the sun-lit wave.
I smiled and passèd on, the while a voice,
Coming I know not whence, sang in mine ear :

" He is thine, and o'er the tide
Thou shalt go to be his bride ;
Yield thee to love's soft allure,
Never lived a knight so pure."

O words of Fate ! To Britain's Court I go,
And there, full sure, my bounden lover waits
To win the troth that I shall freely give.

SIR GALAHAD (*in his dream*).

Come from glade, or bower, or stream,
Lovely lady of my dream !

INA.

Blow, happy winds, that play
O'er the face of the laughing sea ;
Be constant as we run
Towards the purple couch of the sun,
Nor weary night nor day ;
My lover, he waiteth for me.

O ship, sail on apace,
And bear me soon to my rest ;
For thou thyself art a bride
In the circling arms of the tide,
Whose kisses are rained on thy face,
Whose jewels flash on thy breast.

At the prow, where the lily gleams,
Stand thou, O Love, and cry
To the wandering storms that they flee
From the path of thy votary ;
Fair should it be, as the beams
In the blue of a Summer sky.

[*The dream passes. SIR GALAHAD awakes.*

SIR GALAHAD (*rapturously*).

At the prow, where the lily gleams,
Stand thou, O Love, and cry
To the wandering storms that they flee
From the path of thy votary ;
Fair may it be, as the beams
In the blue of a Summer sky.

RUSTIC CHORUS.

[*In the distance.*
Sing heigh, sing ho, &c.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

SCENE I.

[*Morning on the Cornish coast. MERLIN comes out of a cave in the rocks and looks seaward.*

MERLIN.

Now fair has come the morning from the East,
With sunlight clothèd, as a bride whose robe
Is tissue shot with silver ; in her train
The zephyrs sport, all toying with the sea,
That wreathes his ancient face in smiles,
While out, behind the gauzy veil which blends
The sea and sky, a vessel seems to hang in air.
Yet every moment draws to clearer view,
Like harvest moon new risen. What art thou.
White-wing'd ocean fay ? Full sure no hand
Of mortal made thee, but thou com'st wave-born.
And resteth on thy mother's breast secure.
Hither, my bird, that I may view thy crest,
Which now appears as though a flower
Had opened that a goddess might emerge.
What ! dost pass me by contemptuously,
With mock obeisance ? Thou my power shalt
know

In loss of all thy beauty and thy pride,
So soon love turns to hate, when love is scorned.

Spirits of storm, awake !

Come forth on shadowing wing !

By the sign which now I make,
Your caverns in the North forsake,

And hither bring

The fierce winds, for your master's sake.
Spirits of storm ! slaves of my power !
Arise and come ; 'tis now your hour.

[*Storm-clouds sweep down from the North.*
The scene darkens.

SPIRITS OF STORM.

Master, we're here !
Holding the tempest in our hands,
And the red bolts that naught withstands.
Though in terror shrinks the world,
Far or near,
Speak, and thou shalt see them hurled !

MERLIN.

Pass, and as ye sweep
Over the vexèd deep,
Loose wind and thunder and hail
On yon ship with the shivering sail.

SPIRITS OF STORM.

Away, away !
Swift to obey !
Loose wind and thunder and hail
On yon ship with the shivering sail !

[The storm breaks, passing rapidly away in the direction of the ship. The sun shines forth again. The ship has disappeared.]

MERLIN.

Oh ! well the work was done, ye Stormy Ones !
But was it well to do ? The fault is mine
That earth contains so much of beauty less,
And I despise myself.

NORNA.

[Suddenly appearing.]

As well he may

Who turns resistless might against the weak.
Thou hast done more and worse. That pretty
bark,
Which bore at prow a goddess fair and young,
Half risen from a lotus bloom—the sign
Of never-ending pleasure and of love—
Was bound for Britain's Court with rarest prize
Of chivalry—a princess from the Egyptian land,
Whom Arthur destined for his purest knight.
Rash man, dost think that heaven will not repay
Thy blind and senseless act ?

MERLIN.

The thing is done,
And what just heaven shall send must be endured.

NORNA.

The thing is done, but there may yet be time
To undo much. The maid exhausted lies
On Scilly's rocky shore. Bestir thyself !
Prepare thy swiftest car, while I shall haste
On work of rescue. Hither brought by me,
The princess shall by thee be carried swift
To where, on banks of Usk, the King holds
court.

Boat of Light !

Pearl of the Sea !

Come hither, come hither.

*[A boat appears, glowing with mysterious radiance.
Voices are heard as of an invisible crew.]*

VOICES.

Glowing bright,
Ready is she,
But whither, but whither ?

NORNA.

Sail away
Swifter than light,
Where the maiden lieth.

VOICES.

We obey.
Speedy our flight,
Or the maiden dieth.

[NORNA embarks; the boat passes swiftly out to sea.]

SCENE II.—ON A SCILLY ISLET.

INA (alone).

Alone upon this barren rock, where death
Shall come, with slow and lingering step,
In horrid shape ! O why, all-ruling powers,
Was not the mercy of swift ceasing mine ?

[She sees at her feet the figure-head of the wrecked vessel.]

Thou too, fair goddess-flower, the sea rejects ?
Sweet emblem of immortal joy and love.
Now would I cheerful bid despair begone,
That hope once more may nestle at my heart.

SPIRITS OF THE AIR.

Soon rest, soon rest,
On Love's own breast.
Rest ! Rest !

INA.

Sing on, ye wondrous voices of the air,
Nor let your music die adown the breeze ;
Ne'er have I dreamed that sound could be so
fair,
Or notes so sweet give pain and trouble ease.

Peace deepens round me, and I seem to hear
A whispered "Rest," a sound of moving wings ;
Or sleep or death steals o'er me, naught I fear,
Since waking love and joy immortal brings.

[She falls into a death-like sleep.]

SPIRITS OF THE AIR.

Soon rest, soon rest,
On Love's own breast.
Rest ! Rest !

[The boat approaches the shore.]

VOICES OF THE INVISIBLE CREW.

Sail away
Swifter than light,
Where the maiden lieth.

SCENE III.—ON THE CORNISH COAST.

[MERLIN stands on the shore as NORNA's Boat of Light appears, bearing the sleeping maid.]

MERLIN.

In glowing radiance, like an errant beam
Of noon-day splendour, comes the marv'lous
boat,
And, on her deck, at Norna's feet, a maid,
The image fair and pure of death or sleep.

[The boat glides high upon the sand.]

NORNA.

Or death or sleep, the work is only thine,
And thine must now th' atonement be. So
haste,
Thy swiftest car prepare.

MERLIN.

[Looking upon INA.]

If sleep, how soft !
If death, how fair ! And I, by passion's word,
Have wrought this lovely ruin ! What the end
My books refuse to tell, but through my life
Shall sound the note of lowly penitence.

[He bends over the maiden.]

No, no, not death ! 'tis slumber merciful !

O gentle Sleep,
Still hold her in thy fond embrace,
That I may weep,
And she see not the tears upon my face.

Keep close her eyes,
Though with their light I would my being fill,
That so my sighs
She may not know, but lie serene and still.

O gentle Sleep,
While she is wholly thine her strength restore,
That I may weep
Sweet tears of joy and pain for evermore.

NORNA.

Thou should'st be penitent in action swift,
For words and sighs are vain. How passest thou
To Arthur's Court on Usk ?

[Two swans appear, drawing an ebon car.]

MERLIN.

Behold !

NORNA.

'Tis well !

[INA is placed in the car.]

Swiftest birds that ever flew,
To your mission be ye true.
Speed ye fast, though speed ye far,
Death or sleep is in the car.

Death ?—ye bear to solemn rite
Love's own semblance, darkened quite.
Sleep ?—ye go where love shall wake ;
Haste ye then, for love's sweet sake.

[MERLIN enters the car, which ascends and passes swiftly from sight.]

SCENE IV.—AT CAERLEON.

[Lists are prepared for a Tournament.]

THE PEOPLE.

Lance to lance, and glaive to glaive,
While the pennons proudly wave,
Come into this narrow bound
All the Knights of Table Round ;
With their chivalric sport and play
Keeping royal holiday.

Warriors they of high emprise,
From whose steel the heathen flies ;
Heroes in the field and bower,
And of Christian Knights the flower ;
Worthy the victorious lord
Whom they serve with dauntless sword.

Who will conquer in the fray ?
Whose the brow to wear the bay ?

(Some Voices.)

Sir Agravaine before the Queen
Will kneel, the hero of the scene.

(Others.)

Not so ; Sir Percival—'tis he
Will win the prize of chivalry.

(Others.)

Nay, nay ; the chaplet doth belong
To Tristan, skill'd in arms and song.

(Others.)

Mistaken all ; have ye forgot
The prowess of Sir Lancelot ?
Or Galahad, the famous knight,
So pure of soul, so great in fight ?

[Trumpets sound.]

The King ! See how with grave and stately mien
He gives his hand to Guinevere ;
While courtly Lancelot, shadow of the Queen,
Basks in her smile and whispers in her ear.

They take their places :—now the trumpets sound
That call the knights to pace in stately round.

[*Trumpets.*]

[With sudden excitement.]

Lo ! what is this that through the air comes
 flying,
 With beat of snowy wings,
 And gleam of golden rings ?

See, from the West its course 'tis hither hieing !

[*The swans gently lower the car to earth.*]

Merlin ! 'tis he !

But who is she

That, pale and wan, like drownèd lily lies ?

Why sits the Sage

As bowed with age,

While grief and woe are in his mournful eyes ?

MERLIN.

Great King and Lord, now is no time for sport ;
On all that's fair in this thy realm has fallen
A shadow deep. Behold th' Egyptian maid,
Long hoped for as the flower of thy Court,
But now e'en by the hungry sea cast forth,
And flung upon thy Kingdom's rocky shore !

ARTHUR.

I dreamed another fate when, all his realm
By my good sword from danger freed, her sire
Gave me the promise of her hand for him
Among my noble knights whom I should choose.
Alas ! so perish e'en the hopes of kings.
Now, with full Christian rites and honours due
Let this dead maid be carried to her rest.

[*To solemn music, ladies of the Court approach
the car and adorn it with flowers.* MERLIN
stands apart in profound meditation.]

THE LADIES.

Rest, maiden, rest !
Life's transient storm is past,
 And thou at last
Hast reached the haven of the blest.

MERLIN.

[*Interposing.*]

Hear me, O King, as who (unworthy) speaks
With more than mortal insight. Let thy knights
In stately order come and touch the maid,
For so may pass to her the kindred life
Of him, her destined lord. If he should fail
Then let the rites proceed.

[*At a sign from ARTHUR, the knights gather
in the arena, and one by one approach the
maid.*]

THE PEOPLE.

See, of the glittering train,
The bold Sir Agravaine
Advances first. Great Arthur's kinsman he,
 And, in the ranks of chivalry,
A doughty knight. He nears the maid,
And now upon her head his hand hath laid !

Still as a sculptured stone she lies,
Nor tremble once the lids that veil her eyes.

Sir Percival now draweth near—

—The holy knight,

Who, in Christ's light

Walks ever without shame or fear.

Thrice he makes the sacred sign ;

Thrice invokes the Name Divine,

And now, with reverential air,

Doth touch the forehead of the fair.

She flushes !—No ; 'twas but a ruddy ray
Which, from his blood-red mantle, glanced
that way.

For Tristan room !

How heedless he !

Upon his brow no high expectancy !
Just one slight touch the maid he gives,
Nor waits to see if yet she lives,
But sighs and passes on.
His thoughts have to Isolde gone.

Sir Lancelot !—see ye how the Queen,
Half risen, looks with troubled eyes,
As he essays the great emprise !
Guinevere may sit serene.
The maiden wakes not, though, full bold,
Her hand in his he long doth hold.

Comes now, in bloom of manhood, strong and
fair,
Sir Galahad, the knight beyond compare.
Oh, the rapture in his eyes
 As, nearing where the maiden lies,
(The swans upraise their shining wings),
He bends him o'er the car and sings !

SIR GALAHAD.

Mine art thou, pure Lily of the Nile !
Dost sleep ? I call thee with the voice of Love,
That through the world enkindles life and joy :
Awake, Belovèd ; ope thy gentle eyes !
Art dead ? Then, with a kiss on thy cold lips,
I seal thee mine, and bid thee wait in heaven
Till I shall come.

[*He kisses her.*]

ARTHUR and THE PEOPLE.

O wonderful ! she lives !
She moves ! Love's kiss hath raised her from
the dead ;
In speechless bliss she rests within his arms !

SIR GALAHAD.

O love, when first I saw thee in a dream,
Far distant voices sang—as even now !

RUSTIC CHORUS (*in the distance.*)

“ Sing heigh, sing ho, and wait for Spring ;
A flower in her hand she'll bring.”

SIR GALAHAD.

The Spring has come, dear love ! the Spring
has come !
Her flow'rs are everywhere, for all, and thou,
O lily pure, art mine. No more the chilling
blast,
The Winter's death, but life and warmth and
light !
Come, bloom thou ever near my faithful heart.

INA.

If Spring be here and flow'rs deck the glade,
If I, thy flow'r, ope to happiness and love,
Thou art the sun whose all-compelling beams
Have kissed the wintry world to life and joy.
In that bright radiance let me ever dwell.

RUSTIC CHORUS (*in the distance.*)

“ Sing heigh, sing ho, and wait for Spring ;
A flower in her hand she'll bring.”

SIR GALAHAD.

Mine thou wert ere yet I, dreaming, looked
On thy sweet face ! Nor space nor angry storm
Could keep us each from each. Thou shalt be
mine,
O love, for evermore !

INA.

For ever thine, dear lord,
As thou wert mine while yet I knew thee not !
Now let Fate's tempest come : to die with thee
Were life, and life without thee more than death.

SIR GALAHAD.

Once more above thee fills the eager sail,
Once more the sparkling wavelets dance and play
Around thy course, while music sweet attends
Our voyage on the chequered sea of life.

INA, SIR GALAHAD, and CHORUS.

“ At the prow, where the lily gleams,
Stand thou, O Love, and cry
To the wandering storms that they flee
From the path of thy votary ;
Fair shall it be, as the beams
In the blue of a Summer sky.”

THE END.

CONTENTS.

PROLOGUE.

No.		PAGE
1.	INTRODUCTION, RUSTIC CHORUS, RECIT., AND AIR (<i>Sir Galahad</i>)	1

2.	CHORUS (<i>Female Voices</i>) AND RECIT. (<i>Sir Galahad</i>)	20
----	--	----

3.	SCENA (<i>Ina and Sir Galahad</i>) AND CHORUS	29
----	---	----

SCENE I.—*Morning on the Cornish Coast.*

4.	SCENA (<i>Merlin</i>) AND MALE CHORUS	44
----	---	----

5.	SCENA (<i>Merlin and Norna</i>) AND MALE CHORUS	54
----	--	----

SCENE II.—*On a Scilly Islet.*

6.	SCENA (<i>Ina</i>) AND FEMALE CHORUS	61
----	--	----

SCENE III.—*On the Cornish Coast.*

7.	SCENA (<i>Norna and Merlin</i>)	70
----	-----------------------------------	----

SCENE IV.—*At Caerleon.*

8.	CHORUS AND RECIT. (<i>Merlin</i>)	80
----	-------------------------------------	----

9.	CHORAL RECIT. AND SOLO (<i>Sir Galahad</i>)	102
----	---	-----

10.	FINAL DUET (<i>Ina and Sir Galahad</i>) AND CHORUS	116
-----	---	-----